



**Remarks by Carla Hayden
Librarian of Congress**

**Rutgers University-Camden
Commencement Ceremonies**

May 17, 2017

To Chancellor Haddon, the Board of Trustees, faculty and staff, thank you for the honor of spending this day with you. And of course congratulations to Rutgers University-Camden Class of 2017! Go Raptors!

Hats off on the hard work and perseverance that brought you here. To the parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties, godparents, brothers, sisters, family and friends that got you here – this is your day as well.

Four years ago, when you were freshmen on your first day of school at this university, I know it was probably hard to image this day would ever come. After rigorous classes, countless hours in the library (as a librarian I'm hoping that's true), you've interned, and maybe you held down one or two or maybe even three jobs - you made it! I know you've worked hard to reach this day.

This means you are part of a long line of Rutgers-Camden graduates. Some are here today - on this stage, in the audience or even watching online as this commencement is streamed live.

I am moved by the history of this great institution: 250 years of Rutgers and the 65th anniversary of Rutgers-Camden being part of the state university. It is a true honor to be receiving an honorary degree from a university that values innovation and civic engagement; a university that supports students from various backgrounds and allows them to concentrate on such varied fields as childhood and digital studies; a university that provides a safe and supportive space for personal and professional growth. A university celebrating diversity and history.

I know a little bit of making history. Last year, it was an honor to be nominated by President Obama and confirmed by the United States Senate to lead one of the greatest institutions of our nation, and of the world – the Library of Congress.

As the first woman, and the first African-American, in this post, I am truly grateful and humbled. It is especially moving because African-Americans were once punished with lashes and worse for learning to read. As a descendent of people who were denied the right to read, to now have the opportunity to serve and lead the institution that is our national symbol of knowledge, is a historic moment. As Fredrick Douglass" said, "Once you learn to read you will be forever free." And now everyone has the opportunity to be empowered by literacy.

There is also a pressing need for what has been defined as information literacy. As we know, there is tremendous amount of information available today, sometimes called a firehose of data, often in conflicting voices that anyone can produce, and just as often, hard to decipher. We live in a world where information is often measured in 140 characters on Twitter and how many "likes" on Facebook.

In this age of what has been called information overload, the ability to consume information alone will not confer knowledge or certainly wisdom. You have learned many facts and used information in a variety of ways, yet I hate to tell you that most of what you devoured might be useless in several years, or in some fields, months.

However you should all remember that your degree is a passport to opportunity and a ticket to ride and continue your journey with a few less obstacles. It is a ticket to opportunity and you can decide what to do with it. The fact that you brought yourself to this juncture says you want a place at the table. It says that you have invested in your future and I can assure you that the time, treasure, and sweat to get it will pay you back tenfold.

I also have to tell you that despite the fatigue, hard work and reality of your journey to get here today, some of your worst days may lie ahead but you have already persevered and proven you can face challenges with determination and grit.

I also am here to tell you that as you close this chapter, there is still more to be written in your own book of life. Even though you might have a plan for the future in your professional careers, just know that there are still

opportunities for unforeseen twists and turns. In fact, I confess I am an "accidental librarian." I was always at the public library in between job interviews. One day someone asked me if I was there for the "library job because they are hiring everyone." I applied for a job and was assigned to a storefront branch where a blue-jeaned staffer gave story times for children with autism. She was enrolled in graduate library school and I learned what the profession could be. You need to learn to identify opportunities and adapt to change.

Change will come and come fast and what you know now is most likely not what you will need to know in the future. Today is another step in a journey of discovery and the most important and lasting skills you have learned are how to learn and persevere.

Here at Rutgers-Camden, you were students with a mission; you had definite goals and objectives with recognition from the school and professors about those missions, and everything in the school was tailored to advance you in achieving your goals. I am a living example of the need to use those skills that got you here to face a changing professional future. You may need to continue learning and investing in yourself so you can find meaning and purpose in work in a rapidly changing world.

And along the way, try to find time to help others, in your family or community because there are rarely people who have succeeded who have not had a door opened, a way made, or a helpful hand given along the way.

So now, you can make your own history with even more self-determination and faith in your abilities. This reminds me a quote from author James Baldwin: "History is not a procession of illustrious people. It's about what happens to a people. Millions of anonymous people is what history is about."

Remember this is your time. This is your history to be made.

And most importantly, I urge you to take time to celebrate today but continue to take time for the people who were with you today and in memory of those who are not. Take time for yourself, family, and circle of friends (your support group). This will make your journey even more meaningful and rewarding because these are the people who made it possible for you to imagine a better future.

And please remember what Albert Einstein once said: "Logic will get you from A to Z. Imagination will get you everywhere."

So have your imagination take flight and soar!

Congratulations Class of 2017! Good luck and God speed.

